THE MAYORS' INSTITUTE FOR CITY DESIGN

Design Arts Program, National Endowment for the Arts Summer 1990

St. Louis Mayor Makes Design a Priority

In the nine years that Vince Schoemehl has been mayor of St. Louis, he has eliminated an inherited city debt of $54 million, cut the city payroll in half while improving city services, and established a balanced budget. It might come as a surprise, though, that Mayor Schoemehl considers one of his biggest accomplishments the incorporation of sound urban design principals into the rebirth of St. Louis city center.

When he took office, St. Louis had experienced three decades of decline. Although it was the country's fourth largest city at the turn of the century, the railroad had reduced the importance of the Mississippi River, and St. Louis fell into a gradual period of physical, social and economic stagnation. By 1980 the population stood at 425,000—down from 857,000 in the 50s. A Rand Corporation report documented St. Louis' decline and the New York Times mocked the city, calling it "the gateway out".

"Mayors need to defend the argument that good design adds value."

Schoemehl recognized the city's tremendous need for both psychological and physical revitalization. One way he sought to revive hope was through Operation Brightside, a multifaceted clean-up and beautification program. To kick the program off, 8 million daffodils were planted in vacant lots and along major city streets. "It had an enormous uplifting effect," Schoemehl says.

After a survey reported that the city lost nearly 25,000 trees over the past 20 years, the mayor spent $2.2 million to plant more than 18,000 trees and 7,000 shrubs along city streets. Citizen participation has been central to this effort, with city residents tending existing trees and planting new ones.

Schoemehl singles out two projects that have spurred the downtown economic turnaround: St. Louis Centre and Union Station. In addition, the city has doubled its commercial and office space downtown.

In order to build on these successes, Schoemehl had to fight interests that wanted to move the convention center and stadium to the suburbs. He felt removing these cultural centers would hurt the city's revenue as well as its sense of community. "I was absolutely persuaded and convinced that the city has to be the custodian of the community's culture. You can't take the major public assembly buildings. . . and spread them all over and send people in every direction and expect them to identify with the city as a whole," Schoemehl stated.

A participant in the Mayors' Institute for City Design in 1988, Mayor Schoemehl credits the Institute with helping him focus his priorities for development and design: "The Mayors' Institute helped me. . . focus some of my thoughts about how development affects the economy and how development and design can work together to accelerate the economic impact of development. It helped me to understand—to persuade others—that, in the final analysis, what makes a city successful is the quality of the environment it offers."

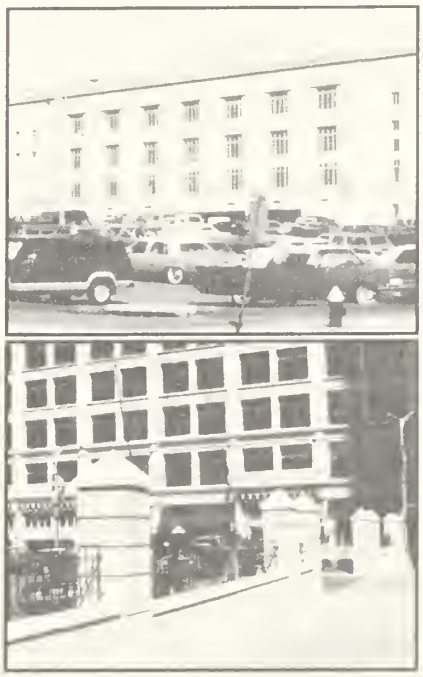
He continued: "The Institute gave me a vocabulary and helped me get in touch with a network of people that could help with [design]. We have always had the design review capability, but we haven't done it until now. St. Louis has resources—the local AIA chapter recently helped the city put together a review panel for the convention center. All of these resources were not put to use in the past, now everyone is talking."

St. Louis Mayor Vincent Schoemehl, Jr.

Mayor Schoemehl has included developers in this dialogue, too, and stresses that thoughtful design can enhance the goals of everyone involved. All new city development now receives much more public review. This is embodied in the newly created position for an architect, director of urban design, in the city's Economic Development Corporation.

How have developers reacted to this? Kathleen Shea, the city's Heritage and Urban Design commissioner, admits that developers screamed at first, but now, she says, they come ready with drawings in hand. "The mayor has enlightened everyone," Shea adds.

Schoemehl felt so strongly about the relevance of the Mayors' Institute that he convened a follow-up meeting in St. Louis and invited aldermen, city staff, and others involved in the city design process. According to the mayor, one of the most significant results of this meeting was that the director of planning reorganized the



Lots before and after new requirements.

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design review process into an interdisciplinary one—involving several city departments—that has improved efficiency and communication.

The mayor acknowledges that advocating good design is not easy. He says that mayors are led to believe that any development is progress and that one of the biggest dilemmas today concerns the pressures by developers to tear down older buildings to build parking lots. "Surface parking in the downtown core is urban novocaine—deadening the downtown—ultimately it diminishes the land values," Schoemehl says. He

"Surface parking in the downtown core is urban novocaine—deadening the downtown."

presented the problem of parking lots as his case study at the Mayors' Institute. The city now has policy in place to combat the indiscriminate expansion of parking lots, which are now required to have landscaping, brick and wrought iron enhancements. The mayor reports that the new requirements have actually discouraged the demolition of buildings, and he believes this will add to the long term value of the city.

Schoemehl recalls that he was not always so farsighted when it came to design. One early planning issue has become a disappointment. The Gateway Mall, conceived in 1927, was to be a preserve of green space downtown. Faced with the need for new investment in the city, he allowed the area to be developed. The unfortunate result, he says, was that four buildings were torn down and replaced by a building of rather indistinguishable character. The mayor wishes he could turn back the clock, and says that if he ever wins the lottery, he will buy that building back, tear it down, and give the mall back to the city.

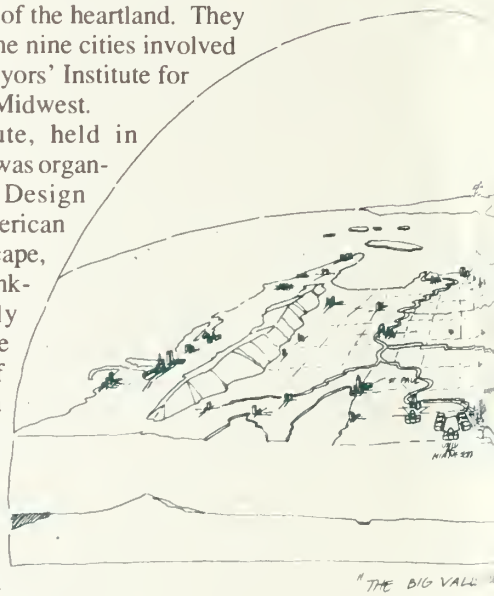
Today, Schoemehl recognizes his role in the city's ongoing history and urges other mayors to do the same: "Cities are like rivers and universities, they're here forever. . .we have to recognize the fact that [mayors] are the temporary custodians of something that's going to be here for a very, very long time after us. We have to protect what came before us and prepare for what is going to come after us."

Schoemehl asserts that the 1990s will put more pressure on America's cities as the nation rebuilds its infrastructure. For him, the crucial question is whether leaders promote quality design as the standard for this reinvestment, or resort to minimum specification work. He has found that good design costs just a minimal amount more—3 to 5%—but can significantly affect the way a building, street or bridge fits into a neighborhood. But, he says, mayors must be forceful advocates for this approach, since others involved in the decision-making process, such as highway engineers, are programmed to think that money should be spent to make things function, not to make things attractive. Schoemehl sees a middle ground—to convince municipal and state engineers, regulators, and others, that it makes good business sense to concentrate on good design. He concludes, "Mayors, as policy makers, need to defend the argument that good design adds value."

First Regional Institute Held in the Midwest

University of Minnesota
November 9-11, 1989

Golden Valley, Eden Prairie, Sioux Falls, Council Bluffs. . . The names of these cities evoke images of the heartland. They were among the nine cities involved in the first Mayors' Institute for City Design: Midwest.



The Institute, held in Minneapolis, was organized by the Design Center for American Urban Landscape, a unique "think-tank" recently created at the University of Minnesota. In addition to National Endowment for the Arts support, the Institute was supported by a grant from the Dayton/Hudson Foundation.

Keynote speaker Mayor Vince Schoemehl of St. Louis stressed the obligation of the mayor to provide leadership in shaping the physical form of the city. This idea became a dominant theme of the conference.

Mayor Gary Peterson of Eden Prairie initiated a discussion about whether design, specifically the architecture and location of a new city hall, can help enhance a sense of community in a fast-growing suburb which grew up without a grid or a center. The city of Hibbing, in contrast to booming Eden Prairie, has suffered a decade of decline in its iron mining-based economy. Mayor

MAYORS

Mary Anderson
Golden Valley, MN

Tom Hanafan
Council Bluffs, IA

Thomas Hart
Davenport, IA

Chuck Hazama
Rochester, MN

Dorothy Johnson
Appleton, WI

George Latimer
St. Paul, MN
speaker

Richard Nordvold
Hibbing, MN

Gary Peterson
Eden Prairie, MN

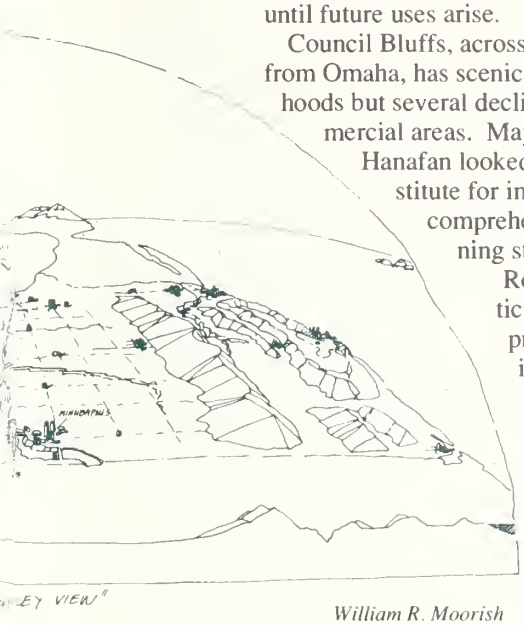
Michael Polovitz
Grand Forks, ND

Vince Schoemehl
St. Louis, MO
speaker

Jack White
Sioux Falls, SD

Richard Nordvold told of a landmark hotel, which has sat vacant for ten years near the town center. He asked if the building could be preserved even though there have been no economically viable reuse proposals. Participants discussed many options, including "mothballing" the hotel until future uses arise.

Council Bluffs, across the river from Omaha, has scenic neighborhoods but several declining commercial areas. Mayor Tom Hanafan looked to the Institute for input on new comprehensive planning steps.



William R. Moorish

Resource participants also presented their ideas and specialties. Donlyn Lyndon, an architect and writer from the University of California at Berkeley, discussed concepts of "place" and elements which make certain public spaces memorable. Elinor Bacon, a developer, discussed creative reuse projects for historic buildings. Jerold Kayden, an attorney and faculty member of the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, dealt with legal issues in design regulation. Tom Martinson, an urban planning consultant, discussed the importance of public buildings and open space in defining and enlivening cities.

In a lively discussion, Mayor Thomas Hart painted a vivid portrait of Davenport, a historic Mississippi River town faced with difficult economic conditions. A major new hotel facility is being considered—tied to plans to bring in riverboat gambling as a tourist draw and economic development tool. Discussion centered on ways to assure that new development would be well-integrated with the riverfront parks and would not damage the connections between the riverfront and downtown.

Mayor Mary Anderson talked about changes created by highway and commercial redevelopment in Golden Valley, an older Minneapolis suburb. Discussion focused on buffer zones between commercial and residential districts, building height and set-back requirements, and the changes in "sense of place" as traditional suburbs evolve into extensions of the greater urban area.

Mayor Jack White discussed riverfront redevelopment in Sioux Falls, a city which has already developed a very successful riverfront parkway system. Mayor Michael Polovitz of Grand Forks asked whether flood control systems for the Red River could be designed as aesthetic enhancements for the city.

Appleton Mayor Dorothy Johnson discussed planning problems in a region of multiple and overlapping government units. Mayor Chuck Hazama was interested in improving the aesthetics of the major street and freeway entrances—the "gateways"—to central Rochester.

Following the Institute, Design Center Director William Morrish commented, "Several common themes emerged. One was a realization of the resources each city has to start with in terms of overall city design—the important landmarks and open spaces. Another was increased recognition of the degree of control and authority local governments can exercise with respect to city design. Participants came away with an expanded definition of city design, including the interrelationship of many elements—the city plan, the transportation networks, infrastructure, neighborhoods, and so on. Finally, I think the mayors realized that intuitive judgments are often very important in design."

FACULTY

Stephen Metli planner	Jerold Kayden lawyer	Thomas Anding planner
William Moorish architect	Donlyn Lyndon architect	Elinor Bacon developer
Grover Mouton architect	Roger Martin landscape architect	Catherine Brown landscape architect
Matthew Seltzer lawyer	Tom Martinson planner	Harrison Fraker architect

Escondido's City Hall Design Competition

Escondido, CA had an identity problem—the city lacked an image. Due to its rapid growth, it also had several very practical needs—a new city hall, a conference center, and a performing and fine arts facility. To address both its image and its practical needs, and to set high standards for design, this city of 75,000 sponsored a design competition to plan the $52 million project. By staging a national competition, former city manager Vern Hazen says, "We hoped the attention attracted to our civic center project would increase Escondido's chances for future corporate and foundation support for civic center cultural programming."

The open competition was conducted in two stages, with all entries displayed for public viewing and comment. The jury included designers and local officials and the public comments were included in the review process. Entrants' anonymity avoided local bias.

Five finalists were selected to prepare more detailed plans and again the public was invited to participate,

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ESCONDIDO COMPETITION PROFILE

TYPE:
Two-stage open national design competition. 108 entries, five finalists selected for second stage.

PROGRAM:
Urban design competition for Escondido's proposed $52 million civic center. The competition process was used to select an architect for the $8 million City Hall and to serve as coordinating architect for the entire project.

SPONSORS:
City of Escondido, CA
National Endowment for the Arts

JURY:
Two architects, a landscape architect, an urban planner, two city council members, a member of the civic center committee, a member of the downtown revitalization committee, and a consultant to the downtown revitalization committee.

WINNER:
Pacific Associates, San Diego, and DMJM, Los Angeles

PROFESSIONAL ADVISOR:
William Liskamm, San Francisco

ALUMNI NOTES

Mayor Chuck Hazama's interest in urban design was so stimulated by discussion at the Mayors' Institute that he launched an urban design forum in Rochester, MN, to address the issue. Two speakers from the Fall 1989 MICD: Midwest—Mayor Vince Schoemehl of St. Louis and Bill Morrish of the University of Minnesota Design Center—participated. Following the forum, the city established a 12 member Urban Design Committee. This volunteer group represents a cross-section of the community, from architects to gardeners, who are involved with the urban environment. The committee serves as an advisory body to the mayor and city council.

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Mayor Kane Ditto has begun a comprehensive reorganization of the planning and development process in Jackson, MS. This includes the creation of a new planning and economic development department (planning was previously carried out within the budget and finance department) that will have a new focus and integrate several existing programs.

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Binghamton, NY has a creative method for dealing with maintenance of municipal service structures. Mayor Juanita Crabb has implemented a program of painting trompe l'oeils on the structures, which works as a deterrent to graffiti while costing the same as the traditional municipal paint job. Active citizen participation has contributed to the program's success.

CALENDAR

National Trust for Historic Preservation Annual Meeting October 17-19, 1990
Charleston, SC

MICD IX October 25-28, 1990
Univ. of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA

MICD West November 8-11, 1990
Univ. of California, Berkeley, CA

Following her participation in the Spring 1990 MICD, Mayor Lila Cockrell returned to San Antonio, TX recommending that the city be more involved in urban design. The city council passed a resolution supporting the creation of an urban design master plan. The city has begun initial work on the plan.

■

Former St. Paul, MN, mayor, George Latimer, spoke at the most recent "Seminar on Transition and Leadership for Newly-Elected Mayors" at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. In his presentation, he emphasized the importance of the physical realm and the fact that developments in this area would be remembered by city residents much longer than budgets, etc.

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At the Fall 1989 MICD, Mayor Peter Clavelle presented a case study addressing ways to best regulate the design of waterfront development in Burlington, VT. The city has successfully acquired the property and has planned a lakefront park. To generate excitement, the city along with several businesses and local groups, is sponsoring an international sculpture festival at the waterfront. Twelve American and international artists are participating. At the end of the summer, Burlington will have a lakefront sculpture garden, with all of the works made of Vermont granite.

■

"Alumni Notes" is a regular column in *CITY DESIGN*. Please send us your comments, questions, and experiences.

BOOKSHELF

American Urban Architecture: Catalysts in the Design of Cities, by Wayne Attoe and Donn Logan. Published by the University of California Press, Berkeley 94720, 1989.

Community and the Politics of Place, by MICD alumnus, Missoula Mayor Daniel Kemmis. Published by the University of Oklahoma Press, April 1990, 1-800-627-7377.

Design Competitions For Public Facilities. Management Information Service Report, Volume 21 / Number 12, December 1989. Published by International City Management Association, 1120 G Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005.

The Living City, by Roberta Brandes Gratz. Published by Simon and Schuster, 1989.

Escondido *(cont. from page 3)*

this time through cable television and the local newspaper. Each finalist was paid $7,500 to complete the second stage work, with more emphasis on cost, function, and details. An outside consultant was hired to look at the cost estimates. Before the jury saw the finalists' proposals, cost and feasibility questions had been answered and verified.

The winner was chosen unanimously. Their plan featured an inviting city hall, much greenery, and both intimate and ceremonial places. Professional advisor William Liskam remarked to the Los Angeles Times, "The jurors were impressed because the design captured a sense of spirit." Escondido has a civic center that provides an image while solving the practical needs for offices, meeting, and performing space. That is the essence of good design.

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